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General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

268th meeting

Friday, 29 November 2002, 10.30 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Fall ..... (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Today, the Committee is holding a solemn meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the General Assembly; Mr. Wang Yingfan, President of the Security Council; Mr. Iqbal Riza, Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet, representative of the Secretary-General; Mr. Chithambaranathan Mahendran, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, representative of Palestine; and Mr. Tuliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I also wish to welcome representatives of Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and all those who have graciously accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting.

I now invite everyone present to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of all those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people and the return of peace in the region for the benefit of all inhabitants.

The members of the Committee observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Allow me to discharge the pleasant duty of making a statement on behalf of the Committee.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is meeting for the 25th time on a solemn occasion, as part of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a day declared by the General Assembly of the United Nations a quarter of a century ago, during the last millennium, in order to remind us, at least once every year and with required solemnity; that the international community must focus its attention, mobilize energy and deploy the means available in order to put a definitive end to the sufferings of the Palestinian people.

To declare that the situation is truly tragic is simply to repeat the obvious, since the Palestinian people have known decades of suffering, punishment and humiliation of all kinds, a direct consequence of the failure to establish the Arab State provided for in General Assembly resolution 181 (II), side by side with the Jewish State, in historic Palestine. For 55 years, the Palestinians have been deprived of a State, and many of them are still without land and without shelter. Hope alone lives in them and sustains them, enabling them to hold out the hope of being able, one day in the not too distant future, to recover all their usurped rights,

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specifically the right to self-determination and, above all, the right to live a normal and peaceful life in their own country.

Although the Madrid peace process launched in 1991 and the Oslo Accords of 1993 gave reason to hope that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East was within reach, the events that have since followed appear, unfortunately, to fall far short of the commitments that were expressed repeatedly. Disappointment and frustration grow at the slow pace of progress, or even lack thereof. Those feelings erupted in all their force following the provocative visit of Mr. Sharon, the then leader of the Israeli opposition, to Al-Haram Al-Sharif, on 28 September 2000, which triggered the horrifying scenes that we witnessed with indignation and impotence, resulting in hundreds of dead and thousands of wounded, principally among the Palestinians but also among the Israelis.

The root cause of that situation is unquestionably the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel and its perpetuation by means of illegal actions taken by the occupying Power, involving a succession of individual and collective sanctions, blockades and curfews, the destruction of public infrastructure, arrests and detentions, the demolition of houses and destruction of other private property, the devastation of farmlands, the relentless pursuit of its settlement policy, extrajudicial executions and deadly raids and the plundering of Palestinian towns and refugee camps. All those criminal acts have left in their wake large numbers of innocent victims, especially women and children, who are disrespectfully described as "collateral damage".

The unbearable suffering and inhuman collective reprisals unjustly imposed on the Palestinians civilian population and, currently, on humanitarian assistance personnel undoubtedly constitute grave violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and of the very clear obligations which Israel, willing or unwilling, is required to respect, as was reaffirmed at the Geneva Conference of the High Contracting Parties on 5 December 2001.

One of the most tragic episodes of those violations, unanimously denounced on 22 November, was the death of an employee of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, who was shot by the Israeli Defence Forces. They then mercilessly prevented even the emergency assistance of an ambulance the United Nations had desperately called for.

Further compounding this disastrous situation, the Palestinian economy lies in tatters. Poverty and unemployment are rising exponentially, the public health and sanitation sectors have crumbled and the Palestinian Authority has been shattered. Instead of concentrating their efforts on building and developing a democratic State, the Palestinians are reduced to a daily struggle for survival. As the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations sadly notes, impoverishment and food insecurity are affecting millions of people, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza.

If famine has not yet become widespread, it is thanks to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the aid and relief agencies. We owe them our gratitude for the humanitarian assistance they provide in extremely difficult circumstances. At times, that assistance is provided at the risk of the lives of their personnel, as we witnessed some days ago with the death of an UNRWA staff member. Nevertheless, we believe that assistance should be encouraged and intensified on behalf of all the populations concerned.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this gloomy picture, the international community is in the process of reaching agreement on the vision set forth by the Security Council in resolution 1397 (2002) and on the Beirut peace plan. According to that plan, any definitive solution must necessarily include the creation of two States, Israel and Palestine, coexisting within secure and recognized borders.

The Quartet of mediators is working resolutely and on the basis of a plan of principle that will culminate in the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State by 2005. The main features of that plan are clear but, for unknown reasons, are yet to be implemented.

It is, therefore, high time for the leaders of the two parties and the international community to take bold and difficult decisions, in keeping with the stakes involved, and to act with the diligence, courage and political will of which great statesmen are made.

Security measures must be closely linked with political, humanitarian and economic progress, in

accordance with the proposals put forth by the Secretary-General and supported by the Quartet. It is clear that extremists in both camps should no longer be entitled to upset the order of priorities and hold the peace process hostage.

As has been repeatedly said, the Committee condemns all criminal and terrorist acts, whether they consist of indiscriminate or premeditated killings, selective or collateral murders or suicidal or targeted missions, and regardless of who the victims, circumstances or motives are — whether real, apparent or underlying.

In the light of this situation, the international community has the overriding obligation to assist the parties to resume negotiations. When the time comes, it could play a decisive role in defining the terms of a final settlement and in explaining how to get there on the basis of the plan of principle I have already mentioned and in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and other relevant United Nations resolutions.

Similarly, the political horizon, namely, the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, should be clearly outlined from the start, as should the time frame for implementation of the various phases. The full cooperation of the parties is indispensable. They should unconditionally accept the premises and modalities of the process, as well as an international presence for control and verification on the ground.

Instead of being the subject of political manoeuvring especially now with the approaching elections, the peace process should be sealed by the Security Council in a resolution under Chapter VII of the Charter. The implementation of that resolution should be evaluated by regular reports to the two principal organs of the United Nations, the General Assembly and the Security Council. Such an approach would be consistent with the position held by the Committee and by the General Assembly vis-à-vis the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine, until it has been effectively and tangibly resolved in all its aspects.

For its part, the Committee will continue to pursue its mandate with the same determination for as long as the situation requires. We fervently hope that the State of Palestine will soon be a reality and that it will be a full member of the United Nations, as a democratic country living in peace with the State of Israel.

Before concluding, I should like to welcome the presence here today of Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the General Assembly, and Mr. Wang Yingfan, President of the Security Council. I would also like to thank them for the interest they have shown in the work of the Committee and for the close attention they pay to the sadly persistent problems of the Middle East.

I should also like to welcome the presence of Mr. Iqbal Riza, Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who unfortunately could not join us today. I would like to ask Mr. Riza to convey to the Secretary-General how much we appreciate his kind support for the activities of the Committee, as well as his untiring efforts and those of his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

While commending the remarkable work already accomplished by the Quartet, I would like to reiterate the Committee's profound gratitude to its regular partners, namely, the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the African Union, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and other organizations. Their participation in this Day once again bears witness to their desire to pursue and strengthen fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation with us.

In the same spirit, I wish to acknowledge the presence here of the many ambassadors and representatives whose heads of State and Government have transmitted messages of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Similarly, I wish to highlight the participation of representatives of intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society. We once again welcome their fruitful partnership with the Committee.

In brief, I want to thank you all for having joined us here, so that together as the United Nations, regional actors and the community of intergovernmental organizations and agencies and civil society together may bring about the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which is an essential prerequisite for the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Beyond the universal message of Thanksgiving, which was celebrated yesterday, and fortunately

coinciding — it being a question of giving thanks — with the equally humanist message of Ramadan, which is centred on the cardinal virtues of tolerance, sharing and solidarity, the celebration of this International Day, on this Friday, 29 November 2002, represents a new awareness of the martyrdom of the Palestinians. This International Day reflects a special moment of commitment to the cause of a State of Palestine living in harmony with all its neighbours, so that for all time, and in the striking words of Albert Camus, "violence will no longer respond to violence in a fit of delirium that exacerbates and negates the simple language of reason" — in other words, the language of justice, peace and brotherhood.

I now have the honour to call on the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Jan Kavan.

Mr. Kavan (Czech Republic), President of the General Assembly: I am honoured to take part in this solemn meeting in my capacity as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session. Recognizing the need to promote and to encourage efforts in support of the Palestinian people, the General Assembly, in its resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, called for the annual observance of 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Over the years, this event has offered the world community an opportunity to renew its commitment to supporting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The question of Palestine remains the oldest unresolved issue on our Organization's agenda. It was on this day in 1947 that the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), partitioning Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish, with an economic union between them. Jerusalem was to be placed under a special international regime. This plan has never been implemented in its entirety, but it is encouraging to note that a two-State arrangement has now become a broadly accepted basis for any viable solution to the question of Palestine, as affirmed in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002).

In the course of the 1990s, despite heightened expectations at the time, the Oslo and subsequent implementation agreements did not realize their promise of bringing peace and security to the region. It was the destructive combination of a failure to live up to those agreements and understandings, the steady deterioration of the situation and provocative acts on the ground that led to the outbreak of the current intifada in late September 2000. Ever since, we have witnessed a continuing spiral of violence, which has resulted in much pain, suffering and destruction. Most tragically, many innocent civilians on both sides have lost their lives and thousands have been injured. Also, in just over two years, we have seen a complete breakdown of the political process.

The General Assembly has been much preoccupied with the developments on the ground. Frequent Israeli incursions into areas no longer under full Palestinian control and internal and external closures of the Palestinian territory mean that many Palestinians are now living under a military, as well as a crushing economic siege. During the past 12 months, the Assembly has met three times in emergency special sessions dealing with Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. The international community has come out strongly against the extrajudicial assassinations of suspected Palestinian militants, which are known to have led to large-scale civilian casualties, and against arbitrary detentions, the use of disproportionate force, house demolitions and continuing settlement activity, as well as against terrorist acts of Palestinian extremists that have resulted in the deaths of Israeli civilians.

The anguish, frustration and anger of the Palestinians are understandable, but tactics of terror and suicide bombing are counterproductive. For example, as the recent terrorist attack against Israeli civilians in a hotel in Mombasa, in which a number of Kenyan civilians also died, will be justifiably condemned the world over, but the Palestinian cause will not be advanced a single inch — just the contrary. The unending spiral of violence will not bring about peace, security or prosperity. The Secretary-General's Personal Humanitarian Envoy, Ms. Catherine Bertini, following her visit to the region in August 2002, underlined the serious and mounting nature of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the West Bank and Gaza. The plight of the Palestinians, who are now enduring a rate of unemployment of around 50 per cent and poverty levels nearing 60 per cent, is of great concern to all of us.

As it has done for many years, in spite of the serious funding shortfalls, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continues to play a vital role in providing essential relief services. The Agency should be assisted in all possible ways by the donor community in order to keep up with the rising needs of Palestine refugees.

It has been unequivocally acknowledged today that there is no alternative to the prompt resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations based on international legality and readiness to take full account of each other's needs and interests. Overcoming mistrust and suspicion, refraining from provocative acts, ending the violence and resuming the peace talks should be the imperatives at the present stage. A comprehensive, just and lasting peace can and must be established on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1397 (2002), which embody the principles of land for peace and the two-State solution.

President Sadat, in his famous speech delivered in the Knesset, made clear that "there is no peace that could be built on the occupation of the land of others" and that

> "in the absence of a just solution of the Palestinian problem, never will there be that durable and just peace upon which the entire world insists".

The world still insists on the same thing, but, as I had the opportunity to see myself, there is ever increasing distrust on both sides and it is violence, rather than peace, that fills the agendas of the day. It is clear that the Palestinians will never reconcile themselves to the unending occupation of their land and will continue to strive for their own national independence, as their national aspirations are undoubtedly as strong as those of the Israelis. They both have the right to their own States, as was made clear by the United Nations 55 years ago. I am glad that the United Nations continues to insist on this right today.

However, for substantial headway to be made, the constructive involvement of third parties is essential. We fully support the sustained and close engagement of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, in their efforts towards resuming the political process. They work in concert with the diplomatic Quartet of international mediators, and I hope that the leaders of the region — and especially the parties directly concerned — will give the Quartet a chance. I strongly believe that all chances for peace should be properly explored. Indeed, in spite of the current impasse, it is still possible to envisage a road forward.

In the past months, the Quartet has worked with the parties on a road map designed to lead the two sides to the negotiating table and on to a final settlement that includes the creation of a Palestinian State within the next three years. I have already mentioned the principle of land for peace, which should be among the basis of any peaceful settlement, and we are all aware that this prospect was included in the peace initiative approved by the Arab States at their Beirut Summit last March. In parallel, the international donor community continues to play an absolutely critical role in providing much-needed economic assistance to the Palestinian people. We encourage the donor community to increase the various forms of relief and longer-term assistance to the Palestinian people at this difficult time.

As participants are aware, this afternoon the General Assembly will take up its agenda item entitled "Question of Palestine". As President of the General Assembly, I would like to reaffirm the Assembly's position that the United Nations should continue to maintain a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions, until two independent States, Israel and Palestine, live in peace, side by side, within secure, recognized and respected borders. It is incumbent on all of us to see to it that this objective is brought to fruition.

Allow me to end my intervention by paying tribute to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. In implementing the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, the Committee has made and continues to make a crucial contribution towards peace, security and stability in the region of the Middle East. I wish the Committee every success in its important mission.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for his efforts to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and for the

unwavering support of the General Assembly for this noble cause.

I now give the floor to Mr. Wang Yingfan, President of the Security Council.

Mr. Wang Yingfan (China), President of the Security Council (*spoke in Chinese*): Allow me first to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the kind invitation extended to me, in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November, to participate in this annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I am very pleased to join in this truly special event, through which the international community has always demonstrated its solidarity with the Palestinian people as well as its commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

As participants are aware, for decades the Security Council has been engaged in efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. In this context, it is appropriate to note that three of its resolutions — resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and, most recently, 1397 (2002) — have been universally recognized as defining the fundamentals of any lasting political solution of the conflict.

During the past year, we were all deeply disturbed by the escalation of violence, tragic loss of life on both sides and vast destruction in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Council has most closely monitored the situation on the ground and efforts to stop the violence. It has heard regular monthly briefings by the Secretary-General and his representatives and has remained continuously seized of developments in the region.

On 12 March, the Council adopted its resolution 1397 (2002). In that landmark resolution, the Council, for the first time, affirmed a vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, would live side by side within secure and recognized borders. The Council also demanded immediate cessation of all acts of violence, including all acts of terror, provocation, incitement and destruction, and called upon the Israeli and Palestinian sides and their leaders to cooperate in the implementation of the Tenet work plan and Mitchell report recommendations with the aim of resuming negotiations on a political settlement.

The Council has been concerned at the further deterioration of the situation, including suicide bombings in Israel and the military attacks in Palestinian areas. In a continuing effort to stop the vicious cycle of violence and stabilize the situation, the Council took action by adopting a series of important resolutions and presidential statements calling for a ceasefire, withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian cities, an end to all acts of violence and a return to a political process.

The Council has also expressed on many occasions its grave concern at the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people and has urged Israel to observe and respect international humanitarian law and take meaningful measures to help ease the humanitarian disaster.

Throughout the year, the Council has supported the efforts of the international community, including those of the Quartet and others aimed at helping the parties move away from confrontation and resume meaningful negotiations. In this connection, the Council welcomed the peace initiative put forward at the Beirut Summit of the League of Arab States. The Council feels strongly that the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority should fully cooperate with the Quartet and other efforts and work hard towards a two-State solution based on Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

A detailed road map to achieve this goal has been elaborated by the Quartet. It is much hoped that the plan will be acceptable to both sides. The Council, for its part, stands ready to assist the Israelis and the Palestinians in this challenging endeavour. The Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority must work together and help each other eliminate all threats to peace. I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm that the vision of a sovereign and independent State of Palestine should be realized and that the State of Palestine should exist side by side with Israel in peace and security.

The Council is also fully aware of the enormity of the humanitarian crisis on the ground and the urgency of providing varied forms of assistance to the Palestinian people. What is needed now is coordinated and sustained relief work by the donor community and the United Nations that would help alleviate the great suffering of the Palestinians.

In this difficult period, we shall continue to support the untiring peace efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. We are confident that his political and moral authority and intensive engagement with the parties will have a profound impact on attempts to salvage the political process. The Security Council also appreciates the constructive involvement of the international community in the quest for a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. It is through the dedicated work of all that this decades-old conflict can and must come to an end, bringing peace and stability to the Middle East.

In conclusion, on behalf of all members of the Security Council, I would like to assure participants that the Council will continue to shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter regarding the question of Palestine. Great obstacles, difficulties and disruptions notwithstanding, we shall remain fully committed to the ultimate goal of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East for the benefit of all parties concerned, including the Palestinian people.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the Security Council for the efforts being made by the Security Council to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict.

I call on Mr. Iqbal Riza, Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General, who will read out a statement by the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, addressed to this meeting.

Mr. Riza: I have the honour to read out a statement by the Secretary-General.

> "I am pleased to take part in the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and I deeply regret that I am unable to do so in person. I am grateful to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for having invited me and congratulate them on their important and urgent work.
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> "This Day of Solidarity is a day of mourning and a day of grief. The human and material losses sustained by the Palestinian people in the last two years have been nothing short of catastrophic. The deplorable situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has kept the whole region in a continuous state of crisis for over two years now, and with no end in sight. Hundreds of lives have been lost, mostly among Palestinians, but also among Israelis. Tragically, and unacceptably, many of the victims have been children.
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> "Excessive and disproportionate force has often been used by the Israeli authorities, along with extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, deportations and collective punishment measures such as house demolitions. Such actions only intensify rage, desperation and a desire for revenge. At the same time, cruel and devastating terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians, including suicide bombings, have claimed large numbers of innocent lives, and have wounded many more people. Such actions only set back the Palestinian cause. The result of these actions on both sides has been the near-total destruction of the belief on either side that there is genuine partner for a just peace.
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> "Since last March, major West Bank cities have been reoccupied in the course of Israeli military operations. Wide-scale destruction has brought economic activity in the occupied Palestinian territory to a standstill, resulting in a humanitarian crisis that the outside world is only beginning to appreciate. Tight closures and curfews have further stifled the Palestinian economy and have reduced life for thousands of Palestinian households to a harsh struggle for daily survival. The capacity of the Palestinian Authority to function has been severely diminished. Chairman Arafat has been confined to the last building standing in his Ramallah headquarters. There are even reports of plans to expel Chairman Arafat from the West Bank — an act that the international community could not accept.
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> "Despite this descent into a seemingly endless cycle of killing and destruction, a parallel process of diplomatic and political progress has taken place. There is today a global consensus on a solution that should satisfy the fundamental needs of both sides and win the widest international support. It is the two-State vision affirmed in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) and accepted by all parties. Achieving this objective requires 'complete cessation of all acts

of violence, including all acts of terror, provocation, incitement and destruction', as again demanded by the Council in paragraph 1 of its latest relevant resolution, resolution 1435 (2002).

"Through contacts on the ground and in the world's capitals, the Quartet of international mediators has been trying to help the parties move away from confrontation towards a resumption of the political process. At our meeting in New York on 17 September, the Quartet principals agreed on a road map for the achievement of a final settlement, including Palestinian statehood, within three years. We are in constant touch with the parties in order to work out with them the specifics of the road map, strongly urging them to embark swiftly on this path. We are assisted in this effort by regional and other interested Powers, and we have been encouraged by initiatives like that of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, which was adopted by the Arab League Summit in Beirut last March.

"I would like to say here once again that sustainable progress can only be achieved if simultaneous steps are taken on the security, economic, humanitarian and political aspects of the conflict. There can be no solution imposed by force. No lasting progress can be made without a clear political horizon: namely a clearly defined final settlement acceptable to both sides.

"Reform of Palestinian institutions is essential, primarily for the benefit of the Palestinian people themselves. However, to take root and produce tangible results, it must be matched by Israeli measures that would create favourable conditions for the resumption of Palestinian economic activity. This includes the conclusion of a Palestinian-Israeli security agreement ensuring the end of all forms of violence, withdrawal from Palestinian-controlled areas, the immediate cessation of settlement activity, the lifting of restrictions on movement of people, goods and essential services, and the disbursement of all outstanding value added tax and customs revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority.

"In the meantime, the Palestinian people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and emergency relief, as Catherine Bertini, who visited the region as my Personal Humanitarian Envoy, clearly indicated in her report. The international donor community has to continue to contribute generously in this time of great need until the crisis is over and the situation has stabilized. The Israeli Government should now implement its stated commitments, lift the restrictions and provide unfettered access of humanitarian convoys and relief missions to the civilian population in the occupied territory.

"The United Nations has been trying to do its part, not least through the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other bodies. Most importantly, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to play a central role in dealing with the mounting needs of the refugee community.

"Within the framework of the Quartet, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, continues to work very closely with the parties and with various representatives of the international community in supporting the peace process and the coordination of international assistance.

"I would like to take this opportunity to renew my commitment to working with all parties until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine has been achieved, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2001) and the principle of land for peace. With the intensified efforts of all of us, the day will come, sooner rather than later, when the Palestinian people will finally be able to enjoy their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and to a sovereign State called Palestine."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Iqbal Riza, Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General, and ask him to convey to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, our sincere gratitude for his important statement and for his personal and untiring efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the

question of Palestine, as well as for his abiding support for the work of the our Committee.

I now give the floor to Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, who will read out a message from Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour and pleasure of reading out the following message from Chairman Yasser Arafat on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

> "We send greetings to all as we — together with all who cherish and promote freedom, justice, peace and humanity — observe this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was proclaimed by the United Nations on 29 November 1977 as a day of solidarity with the legitimate struggle of our people and as an expression and embodiment of our people's just cause, its struggle for liberation and its sacred and legitimate right to secure its freedom and independence, and its rejection of the tyranny, oppression and suffering represented by the Israeli occupation, which is still preventing our people from exercising their inalienable national rights, affirmed by international legitimacy in the numerous resolutions adopted by the United Nations.
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> "This year's observance comes at a time when the Palestinian people are facing unprecedented, difficult and tragic circumstances. Since 28 September 2000, Israel has reoccupied most of the territory of the Palestinian National Authority and has abrogated agreements and failed to implement understandings. Our various regions have become humiliating 'bantustans' that are separated from one another. In one area, the construction of a protective fence has led to the expropriation of 83,000 dunums of our most fertile arable land. There is a new Berlin Wall around Jerusalem, and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza are being prevented from going to Christian and Islamic holy places to worship. Israel has been, and is still using, all the weapons in its arsenal, including internationally prohibited ones, in an attempt to break the will of our people and to try to turn back the clock and destroy, demolish and ruin our people's infrastructure in all our towns, villages and refugee camps, and to transform our various regions into fully encircled cantons. This military escalation — on land, at sea and in the air — has involved the use of all types of weapons as well as tanks, aircraft, armoured personnel carriers and warships.
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> "The objective is to destroy all chances of peace, that 'peace of the brave' we signed with our late partner Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated by these same extremist forces in Israel.
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> "This occupation of our towns, villages and refugee camps, which is accompanied by incursions, bombardments, assassinations, destruction, demolitions and massacres of civilians, such as those committed in Jenin, Rafah, Nablus, Tulkarem, Khan Yunis, Hebron, Gaza and Qalqiliya, has caused massive destruction to the infrastructure that the countries of the world helped us to rebuild in years past. It has brought all spheres of life to a standstill owing to the destruction of various governmental and private facilities and has halted the operation of the vital civil and security institutions of the Palestinian Authority, including its medical, social, humanitarian and economic institutions. Most recently, there has been the reoccupation of, and the reimposition of control over, Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahur.
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> "As all the relevant international organizations have stated, this new occupation has created an extremely serious humanitarian situation. The Palestinian economy has been destroyed and poverty and unemployment rates have dangerously increased to about 70 per cent in Gaza and about 55 per cent in the West Bank. Israel is still refusing after over 27 months to hand over our tax revenues. International humanitarian institutions have ceased to operate and their personnel are being shot at. One staff member of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was killed and another wounded just last week, as reporters and journalists have testified.
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> "This ferocious war, which has been continuing for more than two years, should

motivate the international community to go beyond statements of condemnation, regret and censure and to take action. It must now bring effective pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to halt its aggression, end the occupation and return to the negotiating table with a view to implementing the relevant United Nations resolutions and the agreements that have been signed. Resolutions and agreements must be respected and applied in the same way everywhere in the world. It is regrettable and saddening that the Israeli Government's insistence on thwarting all efforts to calm the situation and on obstructing the re-launching of the peace process has not been countered with the determination that it merits with a view to ensuring respect for the relevant United Nations resolutions, which Israel has absolutely failed to respect. Guarantees are required for the implementation of agreements entered into.

"The formula for resolving and putting an end to the conflict is now clear to all, especially to the parties themselves and the other powers interested in the success of peace in our region. Achieving and building upon the peace of the brave in our region will require a just, acceptable and definitive solution to the ongoing conflict through an end to occupation and Israeli settlement activity — unlawful in all its aspects when judged by any criteria — in the Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, as well as a resolution of the refugee issue in a just manner in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions. Only then will it be possible for the people of the region to live side by side in good neighbourliness and mutual respect. Only then will our people be able to achieve independence and exercise their national sovereignty through the establishment of an independent State on the soil of their homeland, Palestine, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the most recent of which is Security Council resolution 1435 (2002). Israel is seeking to evade the provisions of that resolution, just as it is trying to evade those of the agreements that have been signed and, in particular, the efforts and proposals of the Quartet — the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations — as well as the peace initiative announced by His Highness Prince Abdullah, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, which was adopted unanimously at the Beirut Summit, and the efforts of China, Japan, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Latin American, African and Islamic States.

"We, the people of Palestine, together with all the peoples of our Arab nation, reaffirm our commitment to the path of peace as a strategic choice, to the decisions of the Arab summit conferences, the most recent being the resolutions of the Beirut Summit of March 2002, with their promise of a future of peace, coexistence and good neighbourliness among all the States of our region — the region of the Middle East, including the independent State of Palestine. The resolutions of the Arab Summit, in addition to the most recent Security Council resolutions adopted this year and the resolutions that preceded them, together with the American vision set out in the address given by United States President George W. Bush in June, the European initiative and the subsequent positive and practical scenarios envisaged by the Quartet, all open up broad prospects for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in our region. Israel must therefore respond seriously and positively, just as the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian National Authority have been doing.

"We are determined to secure our inalienable national rights, and we call upon the international community to intervene immediately to put an end to Israeli aggression and occupation; to enable the Palestinian National Authority to perform its functions, duties and responsibilities; to facilitate an immediate resumption of negotiations for the implementation of the agreements and resolutions concluded and with regard to the provision of international observers. Peace, and peace alone, is the way to provide security for all the peoples and States of the region and to open up for them the prospect of prosperity and stability. The current reality demonstrates daily that the key to peace and stability in the region lies in Palestine, the land of peace and the Holy Land of the world's believers.

"We would like on this occasion to convey our appreciation to all our friends and brothers

and to free and honourable men in the world, as well as those struggling for freedom, whose solidarity with our people's cause has never weakened. We call on them to strengthen this solidarity, which will require the prompt convening of an international conference in order finally to close the book on the one last example of occupation in the world, namely the Israeli occupation of our Palestinian territories, and to enable the Palestinian people to secure their freedom and independence, build their State and protect its Christian and Muslim holy places.

"In conclusion, we and our people, at the heart of the stifling blockade and suffering under the brutal military escalation, express to the Secretary-General of the United Nations our gratitude for his ongoing efforts for the achievement of the inalienable national rights of our people. We likewise express warm gratitude to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their sincere efforts and their constant and courageous endeavour to promote solidarity and mobilize international support to enable our people to secure and exercise its national rights on the soil of its homeland, Palestine, and to establish a just, lasting and comprehensive peace — the peace of the brave, which I signed with our late partner Yitzhak Rabin — in the Holy Land between Palestinians and Israelis and in the entire region of the Middle East. Our late partner Rabin gave his life, which was taken by extremist elements in Israel, as the price for such peace. We also thank all the noble, free and devoted friends who have expressed their solidarity with us and with our people's just struggle and who are supporting our endeavour to achieve a just peace and to make progress towards freedom and sovereignty for our people.

"May the peace, mercy and blessings of God be with you all. Together to Holy Jerusalem, with the help of Almighty God!"

The message was signed by Yasser Arafat, President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Chairman of the Palestinian National Authority, in Ramallah on 29 November 2002.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to ask the Permanent Observer of Palestine to convey our sincere thanks to His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Chairman of the Palestinian National Authority, for his very important message.

On behalf of us all, I extend to Chairman Arafat our feelings of solidarity with, unwavering support for, the aspirations of the Palestinian people in its quest for peace, self-determination and statehood.

I would also like to assure Chairman Arafat, and through him, the Palestinian people, of our Committee's firm commitment to continuing its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, with a view to promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

I now give the floor to Mr. Chithambaranathan Mahendran, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Mahendran: To begin, I would like to quote the United Nations Secretary-General, who recently said at a seminar that

> "the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the most enduring diplomatic challenges of our times. The modern State of Israel has known war for most of its 54-year existence. The Palestinian people, on their side, have been in limbo, struggling to find their own path to statehood. In the last two years, the conflict between them has been at its most violent". (*SG/SM/8306-PAL/1922*)

Today, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The Special Committee, established by the General Assembly in 1968, has reported each year to the General Assembly on the conditions affecting human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories — Gaza, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan.

This year, the Special Committee submitted to the General Assembly its thirty-fourth report, a reminder, it

could be said, that the occupied territories have been under occupation for 34 years. The Special Committee sought in its report to convey to the General Assembly its views as to the conditions under which the people in the occupied territories live. These are conditions, the Special Committee found, that do not, in a number of respects, accord with contemporary international norms as to human rights; nor are they in accord with requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which also applies to the occupied territories.

The overriding impression that has formed in the minds of the three members of the Special Committee — Ambassador Kamara of Senegal, in Geneva, Ambassador Agam of Malaysia, and I, in New York — is a troubling one.

The Israeli authorities have put in place a comprehensive and elaborate system of laws, regulations and administrative measures that are designed to meet the policy objectives of the Israeli Government and to enhance control over the occupied territories and over the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. These laws, regulations and administrative measures are framed so that they vest in officials a considerable degree of authority and latitude. They affect important aspects of the lives of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. A rigorous implementation of the laws, regulations and administrative measures, particularly during periods of crisis, creates a sense of fear, despondency and hopelessness among the Palestinian people of the occupied territories. There exists an all-encompassing sense of great tension in the occupied territories, particularly during periods of crisis. And during periods of violence the exercise of such control makes the lives of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories even more unbearable.

The bitterness caused by their treatment by the authorities, their sense of dispossession, their sense of hopelessness and despair, caused to a large extent, it seems to the Special Committee, by lack of progress in the peace process and lack of tangible benefits for the Palestinian people of the occupied territories, makes this situation one of great urgency.

The Special Committee regrets that living conditions in the occupied territories have not improved as hoped. The Special Committee in its report to the General Assembly made specific recommendations that concrete steps should be taken to ameliorate the conditions in which the Palestinian people live in the occupied territories.

Our Committee welcomes the formation of the diplomatic Quartet and looks forward to an active dialogue developing between the contending parties, and we appeal to the international community to remain fully engaged in finding a negotiated settlement to the Middle East conflict.

Finally, the Special Committee considers it to be of great importance that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights — in consultation with the Secretary-General, and, above all, in the light of the respect always to be accorded to the dignity of the human person — establish a system of continuous communication with Israeli authorities with a view to alleviating the very difficult circumstances in which the Palestinians of the occupied territories live, and which give rise to violence, which the Special Committee deplores.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Mahendran for his important statement, and especially for his willingness to travel to New York from Geneva in order to be with us and celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Ambassador, I thank you very much for that, and I ask you to convey our deep gratitude to our colleagues in Geneva.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Ambassador Jeanette Ndhlovu, Deputy Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, who will read a message from Mr. Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, in his current dual capacity as Chairman of the African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Ms. Ndhlovu (South Africa): I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of President Mbeki, in his capacity as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Union, on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It reads:

> "Mr. Chairman, at the outset, let me thank the previous distinguished speakers who so eloquently articulated the situation in Palestine. We thank them for their efforts in putting the issue of the Palestinians high on the international

agenda. Also allow me to thank you for inviting me to participate in this important meeting.

"On behalf of the people of South Africa and as the Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Union, I extend warm greetings to President Yasser Arafat and all Palestinians on this occasion, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

"In his quest for the creation of an independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, in a speech called 'Motion of Destiny', said:

> "The right of a people to decide their own destiny, to make their way in freedom, is not to be measured by the yardstick of colour or degree of social development. It is an inalienable right of peoples, which they are powerless to exercise when forces, stronger than they themselves, by whatever means, for whatever reasons, take this right away from them. If there is to be a criterion of a people's preparedness for self-government, then I say it is their readiness to assume the responsibilities of ruling themselves. For who but a people themselves can say when they are prepared? How can others judge when that moment has arrived in the destiny of a subject people? What other gauge can there be?"

"More than half a century later, the Palestinian people are still denied their inalienable right to rule themselves. Instead, forces stronger than they continue to take this away from them and subject them to suffering, humiliation, destruction and killings on a daily basis.

"It is incumbent on the United Nations and the international community as a whole to use this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People to recommit ourselves to assisting the Palestinian people and their leadership in their own noble quest for self-determination. It is of urgent importance that, in the year ahead, the Palestinians are able to exercise their democratic rights to elect their own leaders, without hindrance, and to reform their own legislative and judicial institutions, and that the international community stand with them in declaring that the Palestinian people are ready to rule themselves in their own sovereign State with its capital in Jerusalem.

"Yet, we look back at still another year that has seen more deaths and indescribable suffering resulting from an unprecedented escalation of violence against the civilian population of Palestine at the hands of the Israeli Defence Forces. The Non-Aligned Movement condemns the Israeli policies of disproportionate and excessive use of force against Palestinians and its destruction of Palestinian Authority institutions. Israel's repeated incursions into Palestinian Authority-controlled areas and its expanded settlement activities are in violation of the Oslo Accords and have resulted in its effective reoccupation of Palestinian territories. Furthermore, Israel's policy of extrajudicial assassinations of Palestinian leaders and activists and its policy of collective punishment of Palestinians through the siege and blockade of Palestinian towns and villages must cease. One of the most disturbing developments, however, is the almost unfathomable humanitarian crisis that is developing as a result of the rapidly deteriorating health conditions of civilians living in the Palestinian territories. No Member State of the United Nations could justify such acts of collective punishment and systematic violence against a population under illegal occupation.

"It is unthinkable that United Nations personnel, who are working in the Palestinian territories, should also become victims of this indiscriminate and violent conflict. The members of the Non-Aligned Movement learned with great shock of the killing of a United Nations staff member, Mr. Iain Hook, of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, just one week ago in Jenin. We mourn the loss of life of all international aid workers who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty and offer our condolences to Mr. Hook's family, colleagues and friends.

"We stand firm in our belief that, however noble the cause may be, there can be no justification for the deliberate targeting of innocent civilians, whether Palestinian or Israeli.

"Allow me, therefore, on behalf of the people of South Africa, and as the Chair of the

Non-Aligned Movement and the African Union, to extend our deepest sympathy and condolences to the Palestinians and the Israelis who have lost loved ones in the spiral of violence. We reiterate our condemnation of the spate of suicide bombings, in which innocent Israelis, including school children, are targeted. We are gravely concerned by this indication of the high level of hopelessness and desperation among Palestinian young people.

"The Non-Aligned Movement has consistently maintained that this tragic situation can only be resolved if the parties to the conflict resume a political process that leads back to the negotiating table. The principled position of the Non-Aligned Movement is that there can be no military solution to this conflict. To that end, we believe that there is an urgent need to support the call of the United Nations Secretary-General for the deployment of an international observer force to this conflict situation. The establishment of an international presence would be an important confidence-building measure and would be another step towards re-starting the peace process.

"Our Movement has always believed that a just and durable solution to the Middle East crisis must be premised upon an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab land and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Only the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to national self-determination, in their own sovereign State, can bring peace and security to the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. The realization of an independent Palestinian State, within secure and recognized borders and living side by side with Israel, is the only sustainable guarantee for Israeli security.

"We concur with the remark made by Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly that our vision for peace can only be reached if we move rapidly, and in parallel, on all fronts. It is our firm belief that lengthy time frames for restarting Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will only frustrate the process. The short-term goal is to create a climate in which both sides are able to sit together and talk again. We should not allow the gains already made at Camp David and Taba to recede.

"We support the historic decision of the Arab Summit, held in Beirut, in which all Arab States expressed their commitment to peace in the Middle East with an independent Palestinian State living in peace, side by side with Israel.

"South Africa is continuing to build on the momentum of the Spier Estate presidential peace retreat, and remains willing to share our experience in negotiations with a broader spectrum of Israeli and Palestinian society. In that way, we hope to continue to demonstrate our firm belief in a just, equitable and peaceful future for the Middle East region.

"We offer our support to the Palestinian Authority in its efforts to undertake meaningful reform and call on the international community to support all efforts aimed at making a meaningful contribution to the restoration of calm and the rebuilding of trust, which has been shattered. It is our firm belief that it is in the interests of all members of the international community to continue to support peacemaking in the Middle East. We commend the efforts of the United Nations, Member States and international non-governmental organizations, which have contributed so generously to enhancing the capacity of the Palestinian institutions of self-government.

"In the same vein, on behalf of the people of South Africa and as the Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, I wish to reiterate, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, our continued solidarity and unwavering support for their legitimate struggle for national self-determination, in a sovereign and viable Palestinian State within internationally recognized and secure borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital."

That concludes the statement sent by President Mbeki to this commemorative meeting.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Jeanette Ndhlovu, and to ask her to be kind enough to convey to President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, in his dual capacity as the current Chairman of the African Union and of the Non-Aligned Movement,

the Committee's sincere thanks for his very important message of support and solidarity, as well as for the constant support of the African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement for the Committee's work.

I now call on Mr. Elfatih Mohamed Ahmed Erwa, Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations, who will read out a message from Mr. Mustafa Osman Ismail, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sudan, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Twenty-ninth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Erwa (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank my brother Ambassador Papa Louis Fall for giving us this opportunity to speak today. I have the honour to read out a letter addressed to him by Mr. Mustafa Osman Ismail, Foreign Minister of the Republic of the Sudan and Chairman of the Twenty-ninth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

> "This year we are observing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at a time when the Palestinian issue is at an extremely dangerous crossroads in its history, following the unprecedented qualitative Israeli escalation that has taken the form of an all-out military incursion into the cities of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa intifada. Since then, and in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, Israel has redoubled its efforts to increase the pace of escalation, and it has exploited that event and its repercussions in a well known and opportunistic act to utilize its military machine to implement State terrorism in the full sense of the word. That has included massacring people and demolishing houses, businesses and even refugee camps. It has done so in a barbaric manner and in glaring violation of all international norms and principles, first and foremost among which are those set out in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Hague and Geneva Conventions on rules and norms of war and the treatment of prisoners, and other relevant international instruments.
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> "In its capacity as Chairman of the twenty-ninth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the Sudan wishes to confirm its full solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people in its sacred struggle to recover its national territory and to exercise thereon its full sovereignty, within the framework of an independent State, with Holy Jerusalem as its capital. We reaffirm the limitless solidarity of the Islamic Group with our brothers in Palestine. We also call on the international community fully and speedily to assume its responsibilities with respect to events in the Palestinian territories.
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> "Developments have come to a head for that defenceless people, which has suffered under a destructive war and measures of siege and closure. It is time to compel Israel to abide fully by the resolutions of international legitimacy that it has violated for so long.
>
> "In conclusion, we confirm that the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference have always strongly supported the Palestinian people in its legitimate struggle to establish the values of justice, peace and stability throughout the world."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would request Ambassador Erwa to convey to His Excellency Mr. Mustafa Osman Ismail, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Sudan, in his capacity as Chairman of the twenty-ninth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important statement.

I now call on His Excellency Mr. Said Kamal, Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine Affairs of the League of Arab States, who will read a message from His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Kamal (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): I, too, wish to commend you, Sir, on your accession to the chairmanship of this Committee, which has constantly helped to strengthen and support the rights of the Palestinian people.

I shall now read out the statement of the League of Arab States.

> "I am pleased to participate, on behalf of the secretariat of the League of Arab States, in this annual celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On behalf of Mr. Amre Moussa, I also wish to extend our thanks to you personally, Sir, and to the Governments and organizations that you represent here for their solidarity with the Palestinian people and its just cause. The

Palestinians, now, more than ever, sorely need your assistance and protection, being exposed on a daily basis to the aggression of the Israeli occupying force. They also need help in recovering their inalienable rights, especially those to self-determination and to an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

"I also wish to express my gratitude to the United Nations and its main bodies and specialized agencies for their support for the rights of the Palestinian people. I thank Mr. Kofi Annan and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their actions to help promote peace and justice in Palestine and for their ongoing readiness to cooperate with the League of Arab States to that end.

"On this day each year, we meet to show support for the Palestinian people and to discuss Israeli policy, which continues to be the major cause of the sufferings of our people and which denies them rights that are recognized under international law and the resolutions of the United Nations. Each year, we express our hope that the forthcoming year will bring us closer to a solution to the Palestinian problem and to the establishment of peace and stability in the region.

"Unfortunately, Israel is openly demonstrating its eagerness to dash our hopes by inflicting destruction on towns, cities and refugee camps in Palestine. How many times have we spoken, on behalf of the League of Arab States and from this very podium, of the peril represented by the Israeli policy of aggression, which began under the leadership of Mr. Netanyahu in 1996 and which we have seen exercised on many occasions, not only against the Palestinian people, but also as a threat to peace and stability in the entire region and as an attack on the vital interests of other States?

"I need hardly recall the fundamentals of Israeli policy that are inimical to peace. In their official capacities, representatives here are briefed on the abuses of power to which the Palestinians are exposed and the obstacles that are set up against the peace process. Thus, the questions we need to focus on today are: What are the political limits of current Israeli policy and what are the consequences of that policy to the peoples of the region?

"Israel's policy rests on the arrogance of power and scorn for the international community. It is short-sighted and very harmful not only to the people of Palestine and the other Arabs, but also to the interests of the people of Israel itself, because it breeds bitterness, hatred and hostility. At the same time, Israel wishes to be accepted by the Arab countries. Israel is living in a false sense of security if it imagines that it can continue this way, because despair, frustration, bitterness and vengefulness are not short-lived. Its actions will deal a terrible blow to the peace process from which we will be unable to recover. It will mark the death knell of peace and security.

"It would seem that Israel only talks about peace and its attempts to achieve peace have been merely pro forma. Recently, it has even refused to coexist with the Palestinian people, even on a small portion of its territory. Its policy over the past two years has been characterized by tyranny and aggression aimed at extinguishing any hope of self-determination by means of military action against the population. It has created a situation of no war, no peace in the region as we await a new international order that may establish a new state of affairs there.

"I am afraid that the deterioration of relations between Iraq and the United States will open the door to new, ritualized approaches designed to make us believe in a false peace while leading us into a real war. There is no doubt that there is a linkage between the United States policy in the Middle East and the actions of Israel. The United States, Israel's principal ally and the guarantor of peace, has a responsibility for Israel's policies.

"The Arab world is waiting for the United States to side with international legality and the principles of right and justice which are enshrined in its Constitution. The United States should be keen on implementing the resolutions of international legality to Israel itself as it does to other nations. The United States should not accept annexation of Jerusalem which would presumably be the eternal capital of Israel. The United States makes nice speeches about Israel's

need to end occupation, dismantle the settlements as well as implement Security Council resolutions, in particular the two most recent resolutions — 1435 (2002) and 1397 (2002) — in exchange for the security that Israel demands.

"We had hoped for a different kind of United States participation in this day of solidarity with the Palestinian people. There is a contradiction between United States speeches and their practices. Since September 11, Americans have been asking the question 'Why do you hate us?' I do not think that the Arab region would be hostile to the United States if the United States were to give up this policy that always favours Israel. We have fond memories of the Eisenhower policies during the tripartite war against Egypt and we also remember the courageous policy of the first President Bush who linked granting loans to Israel to the freezing of its settlement activities. Arabs and Muslims see a glimmer of hope in the Second President Bush and his position vis-à-vis the Arab Muslim community. We do not think that the Americans, who cherish freedom and justice, feel hatred against the Arabs. There must be some kind of productive political, cultural and religious dialogue among the proponents of the three religions. This dialogue would allow for cooperation based on common values and principles and would pave the way for true progress towards peace and security for all. It is the way that the United Nations has chosen and which is its raison d'être."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I request Mr. Said Kamal to convey to Mr. Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important message. I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Phyllis Bennis who will make a statement on behalf of the International Non-Governmental Organization Network on Palestine.

Ms. Phyllis Bennis: Two months ago almost 400 people, representing civil society organizations from around the world, all committed to ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine, met here at United Nations Headquarters, to strengthen our international campaign to end the occupation. On the occasion of this year's solemn commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we observe that the peril facing Palestine and the Palestinians has never been greater.

I am very grateful to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for providing me an opportunity to participate in today's meeting. It is, however, impossible for me to adequately represent the wide range of campaigns, of opinions, of priorities for the International Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Network on Palestine. As an international movement, our priority is reflected in the theme of the September conference held here at the United Nations: to end the occupation. And our most urgent priority today, within that broad goal of ending the occupation, is our call for international protection for Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation.

In September we met at a moment of grave crisis. That crisis today has grown even greater. Our call to action noted the deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the occupied territories and the escalation of repression against Palestinian civilians. We noted specifically Israel's "annexation and settlement, 24-hour curfews, the almost permanent closures of towns, villages and cities; and excessive use of force, causing the deaths of numerous Palestinians.

Two months later those horrifying realities have only increased; they receive less attention on the front pages of our newspapers only because their now routine horror is eclipsed by the threat of grave new horrors looming elsewhere in the region. Our September call to action stated: "We are appalled by the international community's failure, so far, to provide serious protection for Palestinian civilians living under military occupation." Now, months later, we are still appalled. We are still angry and still disappointed.

The United Nations is not simply a forum for the exchange of ideas. The United Nations as an institution has responsibilities and obligations. One such obligation is to ensure that protected people, as populations living under military occupation are defined under the Geneva Conventions, receive the protections required. Simultaneously, the United Nations must bring an end to the occupation. When the Security Council is paralysed, the General Assembly has the obligation to act under the "Uniting for peace" resolution (377 (v), of 3 November 1950).

The occupation of Palestine is growing stronger. And its threat to Palestinians — to Palestinian rights

and to Palestinian lives — grows stronger too. Israel's occupation today claims more and greater uncritical support than ever from the world's sole super-Power. The Palestinians' need for international protection grows ever greater as well. As the international NGO movement, our response to this escalating crisis is to strengthen our commitment to work for an end to Israeli occupation and for international protection for Palestinian civilians living under that military occupation.

While civilians suffer under 24-hour-a-day shoot-to-kill curfews, Israeli settlement expansion continues. Nearly 45 per cent of West Bank land has already been expropriated from Palestinians for settlement purposes. Much of that land grab has taken place during a peace process from which the United Nations itself was largely excluded. Arbitrary arrests, detention and harassment continue, even of United Nations staff members. One such armed raid was carried out last week on the home of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) field legal officer Allegra Pacheco by an Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) combat unit of 20-30 heavily armed troops, who surrounded her home, confiscated her property and held her at gunpoint while deliberately humiliating and then arresting her husband, all the while refusing to recognize her protected status as a United Nations staff member.

The need for the international community to provide serious protection to those living under Israeli occupation has never been clearer. We see that even staff members of the United Nations are themselves vulnerable to the violence of Israeli occupation. The NGO community internationally joins with the United Nations Secretariat in mourning our colleague Iain Hook, the UNRWA director shot and killed by IDF troops last week while overseeing the rebuilding of the Jenin refugee camp destroyed by Israeli forces in April.

There is clearly a need for the United Nations to function as the central actor in ending Israel's occupation. Only the United Nations itself holds the legitimacy and legal authority to act in the name of the world's peoples to defend the requirements of international law. But despite important efforts, so far our global Organization has failed. The Security Council remains largely paralysed. Earlier this year we watched with hope as the Council voted to send a fact-finding team to investigate the spring's lethal events in Jenin; we watched with anger as Israel reversed its claimed openness and rejected the team's arrival; we watched with outrage as Israel's patron in the Council did nothing to pressure Israel to accept United Nations requirements; and we watched with dismay as the United Nations team was quickly withdrawn. We watched with hope when the United Nations Secretary-General called for "robust international protection", under Chapter VII of the Charter, for Palestinians living under occupation; and we watched with dismay when that call was ignored.

And we watched with hope when the General Assembly took important steps in calling for a serious United Nations investigation of the events in Jenin despite Israel's recalcitrance. But we need and expect more. Palestinians languishing under military occupation deserve more. And international law and the legitimacy of the United Nations require more.

We continue our work to support the International Solidarity Movement, Grassroots International Protection for Palestinians, and the myriad of other organizations whose brave internationals, at great risk to their own safety, are working in the occupied territories with Palestinian NGOs to provide some protection and to act as the eyes and ears of the world's people to document and expose conditions of life under Israeli occupation. We commend their work and their bravery, and we extend to them our strongest solidarity.

But the need for their presence in occupied Palestine still reflects the failure of the international community to provide the serious protection that a population living under military occupation requires. We see that failure as the failure of those Member States, including those here today, that do support an end to occupation. It is the failure of the United Nations.

As non-governmental organizations, we continue our efforts in our own countries to press our Governments to support United Nations-based efforts to provide real international protection. We know those efforts have been and continue to be undermined by the use and threat of the veto by the United States in the Security Council.

But I challenge you here today as members of the General Assembly, where the threat of a veto does not exist. I challenge you as leaders and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. And I challenge you as Member States of the General Assembly of the United Nations

that take seriously the legitimacy, obligations and power of international law.

As the world stands on the precipice of a war that threatens to send shock waves across the Middle East, we must recognize the particular danger faced by Palestinians, and we must mobilize the international community, through the United Nations, to protect that vulnerable population.

The danger of war in Iraq holds out a specific serious danger for Palestinians — the danger that the occupying Power might, in response to such a war, carry out its current threat of transfer. Transfer is a polite Israeli euphemism for ethnic cleansing. Transfer, as currently understood, means forcible expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in Israel and/or the occupied territories and into forced exile in Jordan or another Arab country. Some Israeli supporters of transfer perhaps have in mind only a few Palestinians; others may contemplate even large numbers of Palestinians being expelled. But the numbers do not change the clear reality that expulsion of any protected person from an occupied territory by the occupying Power remains a violation of the Geneva Conventions — a war crime. There is no exception. Transfer was once deemed too extreme even to propose in polite company inside Israel. But today transfer is part of Israeli mainstream political discourse.

The danger cannot be taken lightly, or dismissed as over-heated speculation. The political party that openly advocates transfer has a seat in the current Israeli Government. The election of General Sharon, founder of the "Jordan is Palestine" campaign 20 years ago, as the more moderate centrist leader of his party provides stark evidence of a continuing shift in Israeli public opinion towards greater support of occupation against any hope of a just peace. Just yesterday, the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* documented General Sharon's refusal to reject transfer as a solution to what Israel considers its Palestine problem. Transfer is on the front page of the newspapers and is the subject of academic seminars at respected Israeli universities.

But it is not simply an academic subject. It has happened before. During the wars of 1947-1948 and again in 1967, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced from their homes. The more than 4 million Palestinians still in exile around the world — including the millions of refugees under the protection of the United Nations because they have been denied their right to return home — were first made refugees through a process of ethnic cleansing. As recently as 1994, Israeli troops rounded up a group of 415 Palestinians, forced them onto helicopters and ferried them across Israel's border to the snow-covered mountains of south Lebanon. There, in clear violation of international law and the Geneva Conventions, they were unceremoniously dumped, without residency permits or protection from the elements, and there they remained, in tents on the freezing mountainside, for more than a year. United Nations condemnation was swift, but Israeli accountability for its violations remained elusive.

Over 100 Israeli academics have signed a letter condemning the talk of transfer and rejecting even consideration of such an attack on the Palestinians. Those Israelis, along with others in the Israeli peace movement, understand that transfer, like other tools of repression in the arsenal of military occupation, will not lead to an end to attacks against Israeli civilians. Such attacks, by suicide bombers or others, are themselves a violation of international law and must be condemned.

But if we are serious about ending such attacks on Israeli civilians, we must be serious about ending the conditions that give rise to those attacks: that is, by ending the occupation. The Israeli peace organization Gush Shalom had it right. After the first of the suicide bombings that killed a large number of civilians, particularly children and young people, two summers ago, they said, "The occupation is killing all of us. It is killing Palestinians and it is killing Israeli Jews." They were right.

The United Nations has condemned, appropriately, attacks on civilians. Is it not appropriate for the United Nations to consider now, today, an explicit condemnation and rejection ahead of time of any policy of transfer, precisely in the hope of preventing such a severe human rights violation from ever taking place?

There is already a similar campaign under way to warn pre-emptively of the consequences of war crimes. this one carried out by Israeli peace activists. They caution military officers of the Israel Defence Forces that certain future actions they may be ordered to take in maintaining Israel's military occupation could constitute war crimes that might be eligible for prosecution under the Rome Treaty by the International

Criminal Court. Would it not be appropriate for the United Nations, through its human rights and other bodies, to issue such a warning as well?

We know that the Israel-Palestine conflict is one consistently vulnerable to distortion and misstatement of fact. And even beyond distortion and misstatement, differences in history and vantage point bring about different assessments of the same set of events. If we look, for example, at the events that took place in Jenin last spring, we know that they meant different things to different people.

For the Israeli military, Jenin was a battle against "terrorism", and the 28 dead civilians were simply collateral damage. For the United States, Jenin provided the model on which Israeli training of United States commandos preparing for urban warfare in Iraq could be based. For Palestinians, Jenin was part of the human price paid by a population under military occupation. For human rights organizations, the events at Jenin included at least 10 violations of the Geneva Conventions — war crimes.

And for the United Nations? The General Assembly's mandate for a report on Jenin was an important step, but only a first step. Much more is needed. Much more is required of the international community under the obligations of the Geneva Convention to protect people living under occupation. There has never been a greater need for United Nations centrality in dealing with the current crisis. A real quartet would be fine, but a solo act with three back-up singers limited to joining in on the chorus is not quite the same thing.

I extend a challenge to you here today — to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, whose role must be to lead the General Assembly to take seriously its obligations to the Palestinians; a challenge to the Non-Aligned Movement, whose own history is bound up with the struggle against colonialism and occupation; a challenge to the European Union, whose commitment to human rights shapes their primary identity; a challenge to the Member States of the General Assembly itself that take seriously the world community's obligations to implement and enforce United Nations resolutions and international law.

I challenge you all to make real the United Nations expressed commitment to providing international protection to Palestinians living under occupation. I challenge you to defy the veto-driven paralysis of the Security Council and to reclaim for the General Assembly the right to prepare, mandate, fund, recruit and deploy an international protection force for the Palestinians living under occupation and for Israelis threatened by the consequences of occupation. I challenge you to refuse the bribes, threats and punishments routinely meted out by one powerful country, in order to make good on the global obligations of the United Nations. I challenge you to reject President Bush's claim that the relevance of the United Nations is defined by United Nations acquiescence to Washington's policies.

President Bush said something else in a far different context. He asked whether United Nations resolutions "are to be honoured and enforced, or cast aside without consequence". We in the non-governmental organization movement know the answer to that question. Our challenge to you, the United Nations, is to join us in a global effort to honour and enforce United Nations resolutions — all United Nations resolutions. Those resolutions are consistent. They require an end to Israeli occupation of Palestine and protection for the Palestinian people. And they place that obligation squarely on the United Nations. We look to you, again, with hope.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank, through Ms. Pennis, all civil society organizations that are working on the question of Palestine around the world for the invaluable contribution they continue to regularly make to the work of our Committee.

We stand to gain from hearing from non-governmental organizations and organizations of civil society, because they take us away from the usual diplomatic rhetoric, with all of its convoluted statements. It is refreshing indeed for us to hear instead from civil society organizations, because they have an advantage: they can dot the "i"s and cross the "t"s and put forward multiple issues and challenges. Everyone here listened to them very carefully and will keep their statements in mind in the various forums where we gather — be it here, in the Committee, the European Union, the African Union, the Non-Aligned Movement or the Security Council — in a word, throughout the entire international community.

I believe that each of us has heard them loud and clear and will endeavour, in their actions, to keep in

mind what they have just told us. Let me say once again that it was most edifying and refreshing. I wish in particular to thank Ms. Phyllis Bennis, because I know that non-governmental organizations play the role of vigilant sentinel in the service of human rights.

I now have the pleasure to announce that the Committee has received many messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State or Government, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations. The text of these messages will be published in a Special Bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I would like to read out the list of names of those who have sent them.

We have received messages from the following heads of State: Guinea, Brazil, Mexico, Namibia, Afghanistan, Viet Nam, Jordan, Senegal, Qatar, Algeria, Bolivia, the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Chile, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Egypt, Venezuela, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Cyprus.

We have received messages from the following heads of Government: Thailand, China, Belarus, Malta, Malaysia, the Syrian Arab Republic and India.

We have also received messages from the following Minister for Foreign Affairs: Oman, Burkina Faso, Japan, Madagascar, Slovenia, Romania, Ukraine and Slovakia.

The Governments of Argentina, Central African Republic and Uruguay have also sent messages.

Turning to intergovernmental organizations, we received messages from the African Union Commission, the European Union and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Messages have also been sent by the following non-governmental organizations: Global Ministries Board, United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Anglican Observer to the United Nations, Mennonite Central Committee United Nations Office and the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

On behalf of the Committee, I should therefore like once again to express our sincere thanks to the heads of State or Government, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations I have just mentioned, both intergovernmental and non-governmental, as well as to all participants for their tireless efforts to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine, and especially for the constant support they have always given to the mandated activities of our Committee.

The statements that we have heard and the messages of solidarity we have received today amply demonstrate the determination of the international community to move forward to establish peace in the Middle East and to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their inalienable rights on the basis of United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy. I can assure everyone here that all the members of the Committee will spare no effort to attain these objectives.

I now have the pleasure of calling on His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine Liberation Organization) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure, at the close of this commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, to express to you, Sir, and to all the other members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, our sincere thanks and appreciation for your constant efforts to promote the objectives of the Committee and successfully to resolve the Palestinian question, through the establishment of an independent sovereign State of Palestine and the return of refugees to their land, with Jerusalem as its capital.

On behalf of our Palestinian people, we would like to register our appreciation for all the expressions of solidarity, and in particular for the statements made by Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the General Assembly and Mr. Wang Yingfan, President of the Security Council. I wish also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his constant efforts in the service of all just causes in this world and the cause of peace.

My thanks go also to all the heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, and international groups and organizations that have sent messages expressing full and firm solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for their just cause. We thank Mr. Mahendran for his expression of solidarity. We thank also President Mbeki, current Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement; the

Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; and Ms. Phyllis Bennis, on behalf of the non-governmental organizations, for their spirit of solidarity.

The Palestinian people sincerely appreciate all sentiments of solidarity, whether expressed at this meeting or transmitted to the Committee.

In conclusion, we pray to God Almighty that we will succeed in establishing the pillars of peace and stability in the region, so that life can return to normal — safe and stable, with justice for the Palestinian cause. We express our thanks and gratitude to all those who participated with us in this Day of Solidarity.

What we hear and see in our occupied territories makes clear Israel's fervent and mad desire to crush the Palestinian resistance and to deprive the Palestinian people of sustenance rather than dealing with the question of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people in a positive manner, recognizing them as legitimate and acknowledging the fact that they should be consolidated through the creation of effective institutions.

The rulers of Israel have failed to face up to the stone-throwing children. I want to tell them that, despite their oppressive actions and after a long, bitter struggle to resist occupation, victory is close. God will lead us to victory.

May peace and the blessings of God be upon you all.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like once again, on behalf of the Committee, to convey to Mr. Kaddoumi our support and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

I would like to ask the interpreters and conference officers to bear with me for a few minutes longer. Before concluding this solemn meeting, I would like to thank everyone who made it possible, particularly the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information and the Office of Central Support Services, as well as everyone else involved — reporters, correspondents and others — for their help.

I also want to remind the Committee that an exhibition of Palestinian art, organized by the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, will be opened this evening at 6 p.m. in the public lobby of the General Assembly building. This year's exhibition, entitled "Palestinian cities: images of life from the turn of the twentieth century", consists of a series of photographs from the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The opening of the exhibition will be followed by a reception, to which all are cordially invited.

Immediately after this meeting, at 1 p.m. — just a few minutes from now — two films, one entitled "Palestine: story of a land", and the other, "After Jenin", will be screened in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library auditorium. The two films give an account of developments related to the question of Palestine from 1950 to the present day. All are cordially invited to attend the screenings of those films, about which further detailed information has been provided.

Once again, I would like to thank all those who joined us and participated in this meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.